You ask, what is our policy?

An essay by Mark Thomson

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Over the past six years, Australia has faced a succession of security challenges that have tested both the preparedness and structure of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and challenged many long-held preconceptions about how and when we might use armed force. Within this short period, the current Government's strategic policy has been revised, not once, but twice – a White Paper in 2000 and an Update in 2003.

For its part, the Government says that it's content with the policy settings as they stand. If so, they are content with ambiguity. By itself, the White Paper presents a coherent, though in some ways incomplete, package. But a lot has happened since then, and the Update only goes part of the way towards setting out a clear position. The cumulative result is opaque at best.

The purpose of this essay is to survey the evolution of Australian strategic policy over the past thirty years and assess both where we stand at the moment, and where we might be headed to. I make no apology for taking an historical approach. Tracking the evolution of our strategic policy is the only way to understand the factors that will shape its trajectory into the future.

Stepping back from forward defence

Follwing the Second World War, Australia based its strategic policy on 'forward defence' within the context of alliances with both the UK and increasingly the US. Forward defence saw Australian forces garrisoned in Singapore and Malaysia, and fighting in major wars in Korea and Indochina as well as a long counterinsurgency in Malaya. In doing so, we were playing our part as a Western nation in stemming the spread of communism which threatened to slowly work its way towards us – country by country. However, even as our military commitment to forward defence reached its zenith in the late 1960's with 8,000 troops in Vietnam, the strategy was becoming both less tenable and, fortunately, less necessary.

Already, in 1967, the British had announced that they would disengage from the region and withdraw their forces from east of the Suez Canal, then in 1969, Nixon's Guam doctrine put allies on notice that they needed to be more self-reliant in providing for their own defence, a policy made all too real by the eventual decision to withdraw from South Vietnam and leave the nation to its fate. Moreover, by the end of the decade, the prospects for security in many parts of the Southeast Asia were promising enough to justify a less pro-active role by Australia anyway. In particular, the emergence of a palatable dictatorship in Indonesia had already reduced one area of concern.

So it was, that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, policy makers grappled with a quickly changing environment until, in 1972, the concept of defence self-reliance arose following the Defence Review of that year (actually, self-reliance had been considered by Cabinet as early as the mid-1960s but was rejected as being unaffordable). In any case, it was not until 1973, that the newly elected Labour government set about reorienting from a strategy of forward defence, to – as Whitlam

put it afterwards – 'one of continental defence, defence of Australia, its island territories, maritime resource zone and sea and air approaches'. The shift was made tangible by the recall of the Australian garrison from Singapore in that same year (Australian combat elements had already withdrawn from Vietnam in early 1972).

There was more behind this rapid shift than our allies taking a more hands-off approach in the region. It was also the era of US détente with the Soviets and reproachmont with Communist China. Whatever inclination the US had to 'bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe', as John Kennedy put it in 1961, had been bled away by Vietnam. The costly failure in those far off jungles also held a persuasive sway over Australian public sentiment, and to an extent also within our defence forces. In this context, shifting to a policy of defence of Australia turned the usual maxim of preparing to fight the last war on its head: this time we were consciously preparing *not* to re-fight the last war.

Moreover, for a short period at least, it also provided a hedge against the not too remote possibility that the domino principle would turn out to be correct at a time when our allies had withdrawn and communism was spreading into Cambodia and Laos. Fortunately, by the mid-1970s this threat had evaporated and the Cold War became frozen in Asia. This brought to a close an era where the great power stand off and its proxy wars directly concerned us. In this sense, the cold war ended for Australia in 1975.

In 1976, the Fraser government tabled Australia's first modern Defence White Paper, *Australian Defence* that eloquently set out the underlying principles of the defence of Australia (DOA) strategy. But, coming less than three years after the shift from forward defence, it still left a lot of detail to be worked out. In the years that followed, a lot of analytic work was done within the Department of Defence to understand what was required to defend Australia, although little of this was translated into concrete policy.

Indeed, a decade later, in the mid-1980s, there was still heated debate within Defence – principally, but not exclusively, between the civilians and military. The critical issue was the size and character of threat on which to plan the ADF. Army, in particular, saw things in more dire terms than their civilian colleagues – to the extent that the sum of all fears in Army saw the need for a force-in-being of some 94,000. Aside from implying a formidable threat that stretched credibility, it set a manpower goal that was clearly impractical without conscription.

Frustrated with the impasse, the then Defence Minister Kim Beazley, commissioned an independent review of Australia's defence capabilities. The resulting report *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* became known as the *Dibb Report* after its author Paul Dibb. Building on the analytic work of the preceding years it further clarified the principles set out in the 1976 White Paper, settled the issue of what threat to plan against, and made specific recommendations on the structure, disposition and preparedness of the defence force. This formed the basis of the Hawke government's White Paper *The Defence of Australia* in the subsequent year. It had four key elements:

First, it was a policy of defence self-reliance, meaning that 'Australia must have the military capability to prevent an enemy from attacking us successfully in our sea and air approaches, gaining a foothold on our territory, or extracting political concessions from us through military force'. It rejected the notion of continental defence and instead defined an area of 'direct military interest' which included Australia and its territories, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and other nearby SouthWest Pacific nations. Over this area, it said that we required a 'force-in-being to defeat any challenge to our sovereignty and specific capabilities designed to respond effectively to attacks'. Given that the area covers some 10% of the earth's surface (and the entire Indonesian archipelago) it was hardly the Maginot line that some have suggested. It was, in fact, a layered strategy to defend Australia by denying our air and maritime approaches to an adversary. This put a premium on intelligence and surveillance, including the development of the JORN over-the-horizon radar, as well as on capable air and naval assets able to operate at long distances. Closer to home 'defence in depth' demanded capable mine clearance capabilities to protect our northern ports and 'highly mobile [land] forces capable of rapid deployment' across the north of Australia.

The priority accorded to defending Australia was absolute, to the extent that it was the sole rationale for structuring the defence force – the 'force structure determinant' as it was termed. Thus, as a matter of policy, no formal account could be taken of the demands of, for example, contributing to allied operations further afield.

Second, self-reliance was defined in the context of international relationships especially the US alliance. In fact, without the ANZUS alliance and the access it gave to intelligence, sophisticated equipment and logistics support in an emergency, self-reliance would have been unaffordable, if not impossible. In return, it was acknowledged that Australia could be called upon to make military contributions to allies in a crisis, and that as a member of the 'Western community of nations' we had an ongoing role in helping the US counterbalance Soviet power including through the joint facilities at Pine Gap. A high priority was also given to working with our neighbours to enhance their own security through consultations, military visits, combined exercises and the like.

Third, not only was a major attack on Australia considered unlikely, it was judged that at least ten years would be available to prepare once a threat became apparent (with lesser warning times for lesser contingencies). This 'warning time' would allow the defence force to expand to meet the challenge. In the meantime, they would stand ready to respond to lower level conflicts that might arise more quickly. This was said to include the possibility of covert harassment of remote settlements in northern Australia, off shore territories and resource assets, and shipping. And at the worst, overt air attacks on the same targets, mining of northern ports and intensive raiding by land forces. This meant that the ADF had two simultaneous tasks. First, to maintain a core for expansion for large scale conventional conflict, and second, to be ready to meet less demanding tasks that could arise at short notice.

Finally, in what over time became a point of controversy and ultimately resentment, the Army was assigned no role beyond Australian territory in the defence of Australia. This was in stark contrast to the wide-ranging purviews of Navy and Airforce across the area of direct military interest, not to mention seventy years of Army

expeditionary history. Instead, Army's primary task was to protect the north of the continent, and major elements of the force were relocated to Darwin for that purpose. Not even the possibility of sending troops to dislodge an adversary from nearby Indonesia or Papua New Guinea was conceded. As far as Army's role went, this *was* continental defence. Moreover, although the Army was not excluded from being deployed in support of allied efforts, it was conspicuously absent from the discussion of contributions we might make.

It's no secret that Army found the roles that they were assigned (especially that of fending off small-scale incursions) less than convincing. As a result, it took them an entire decade to develop an operational concept for dealing with incursions onto Australian territory. This took the form of the 1979 *Restructuring the Australian Army* report. Moreover, there is little sign that any serious mobilisation planning ever occurred.

Even when it came to our air and maritime forces, the discussion of contributions to allied operations was along the lines of modest participation rather than national mobilisation. Thus, notwithstanding a cold war of global proportions and potentially grave consequence, there was no suggestion that we would mount a national effort in support of a great power struggle, nor even send a middling sized force to fight in a major ground war in Asia as we had in the early 50's and late 60's. If anything, the opposite was implied. This reluctance to become embroiled in foreign wars, and especially ground wars, evolved over time into the notion of making 'niche contributions' to distant allied/coalition efforts.

This carefully calibrated approach to allied and international conflicts betrays a streak of hard pragmatism, or even cynical realism, that underwrites the defence of Australia doctrine. Although no official policy document past or present could say it as bluntly as this; our contributions to foreign conflicts would be no larger than that needed to serve our national interests and maintain our strategic relationships. Of course, this is nothing new, even during the period of forward defence there were no blank cheques given to our allies. Australian's contributions to both Korea and Vietnam were aimed at maintaining both the US alliance and US military engagement in our neck of the woods. The result was that the US ended up doing the heavy lifting while we made little more than a political contribution compared with the heroic scale of our efforts in two world wars.

Defence of Australia was pragmatic in another sense. The 1987 White Paper, like all that followed, was not like a theorem in Euclidian geometry. It did not take possible threats as axioms and deduce the unique force structure that followed. Although a wealth of detailed and careful analysis was undertaken, the final result was a compromise between the realities of the money likely to be available in the budget, the limits of an all volunteer force, the legacy capabilities and projects around at that time, and the strong institutional interests of the three services.

Less than three years after the 1987 White Paper, the Cold War ended. Then dawned an optimistic era of a 'new world order' based on multilateral cooperation and a UN unbound from US-Soviet deadlock. This ended a period of more than fifteen years where the ADF was effectively kept in stasis, and marked the beginning of Australia actually using its armed forces, albeit on a modest scale at first. Over a period of five

years, we contributed to UN operations in Namibia (1989) Cambodia (1992), Somalia (1992) and Rwanda (1994). In each case we sent small to medium contingents of ground forces to what were perceived as low threat peace operations, none of which taxed ADF capacity.

Iraqi's invasion of Kuwait in 1991 presented the Government with a very different type of challenge. The annexation of a small state by its larger neighbour threatened to undermine the development of orderly post-cold war system. This engaged the interests of many nations including Australia, and some thirty nations joined the US-led (and UN mandated) military action to draw the line on unacceptable aggression by one nation against the other. As a result, Australia sent forces to war – as opposed to peacekeeping – for the first time in almost twenty years.

Looking back, our contribution – two frigates, a support ship plus medical teams and intelligence analysts – looks modest and safe compared with more recent ADF deployments to the Gulf. But while it's true that our 1991 contribution entailed a much less extensive range of capabilities than in 2003, it did entail substantial risks. Remember; the Iraqi airforce had not yet been bombed into the ground so that our vessels faced a very real threat from anti-shipping missiles. So much so, that a crash program was undertaken to fit protective close-in weapons systems onto the vessels. Nonetheless, it's noteworthy that no land combat forces were sent – even twenty years on, it was too early for 'boots on the ground'.

By the mid-1990s a more pragmatic view of the UN's role had developed, but this did not prevent a more outward looking worldview in the 1994 White Paper *Defending Australia*. It highlighted the changes amongst the major powers and the implications for Asia, proffering that the environment had become more fluid and complex. It also observed that economic growth in the region, particularly in China, was set to continue thereby increasing the nature and scale of forces that might be brought to bear against us. Nonetheless, it left the strategic framework and attendant priorities for the ADF unchanged.

The fact that DOA survived the end of the Cold War largely unscathed is testament to its austere construction. It depended on little more than geography and the very remote possibility that we might some day have to defend our selves with limited assistance. The demise of the Soviet threat did nothing to change this, and nothing arose in the decade that followed to up the ante on the carefully calibrated contributions (read: small, managed risk and limited duration) that we made to international operations.

Further more substantial evolution of the policy was looming as the 1990s drew to a close, and following the East Timor crisis in 1999 it became inevitable. But before we turn to examine those years, it's worth asking how the ADF changed in the quarter century between Whitlam's rejection of forward defence and the mid-to-late-1990s. After all, so far we've only examined the rhetoric and actual deployment of forces to operations, what about the long-term process of shaping the ADF.

Beyond the rhetoric

To start with, the scale of the ADF did not change all that much (aside from the disbanding of national Service in 1974 which saw Army fall from nine to six infantry battalions). From 1974 to 1990 the strength of the ADF stayed around 70,000. Then, from 1990 to the end of the decade, the force fell by around 25%. This was largely, but by no means entirely, the result of non-combat personnel being replaced by commercial support. Where there were real cuts to the size of the force, they were intended to free up money for capital investment and preparedness. In effect, the ADF was shrinking to meet the reality of the budget.

The largest single substantive re-adjustment came in 1991 with the Force Structure Review. Excluding accompanying efficiency and commercial support initiatives, it reduced the ADF by 5,620 permanent personnel (around 9%) while creating a new higher than normal readiness reserve force of 4,100 personnel, the 'Ready Reserve'. Not surprisingly, given the strategic priorities of the day, the Force Structure Review cuts fell hardest on Army (3,220) followed by Air Force (1,800) and Navy (600). Any solace that the Ready Reserve might have provided was lost when it was absorbed into the general Reserve by the incoming Coalition government in 1996.

In addition, the make-up of the force changed as equipment became obsolete and new acquisitions were made. Although, it's surprising how limited the changes actually were. In terms of force structure, the Air Force was the most static of the services over the quarter century. Although most of its platforms were replaced, sometimes with slightly lesser numbers, it largely maintained the assets needed for lift, maritime patrol, air-combat and strike.

To a lesser extent the same was true of Navy who, by the mid- to late-1990s, had roughly as many surface combatants as it had when we withdrew from Vietnam. However, a large chunk of the combatant fleet was being replaced with 'fitted for but not with' Anzac class frigates designated with a lesser Tire-2 role. The patrol boat force remained at around fifteen vessels, but more capable vessels were acquired over time. The six old Oberon class submarines were being replaced (ever so slowly) by an equal number of (eventually) more capable Collins class boats. And, true to the guidance in the 1987 White Paper, the mine hunter force was being enhanced.

Arguably the biggest changes to Navy were the loss of the aircraft carrier in 1982, and the expansion of the amphibious lift fleet with the purchase of the two US-surplus amphibious vessels in the mid-1990s. While the former arguably (but not necessarily) represented a stepping back from the capabilities needed for forward defence, the latter is less easy to accommodate in an era when the Army was effectively glued to the continent for the purposes of force structure. In fact, when the original decision was made to acquire the two vessels it was intended that one would replace HMAS *Tobruk* in the amphibious role, and the other would be a training ship. Over time, the decision was made to retain *Tobruk* and configure both of the second-hand vessels for amphibious operations. Thus, our amphibious deployment capacity was more than trebled through slow quiet 'capability creep' without any official change to Army's designated role. This shows that pragmatism can sometimes side step the strictures of policy.

In raw numbers of personnel it was Army that changed the most. The Force Structure Review saw one of Army's three non-reserve Brigades downgraded from a mixed reserve-permanent structure to an entirely Ready Reserve establishment. This and other cuts reduced the regular combat force by 3,220 down to 11,000 permanent troops in 1991. (The overall Army was actually much larger – numbering around 26,000 even in 1996, which says something about the personnel overhead being carried at that time). However, the cuts to Army in the early 1990s left only four permanent infantry battalions which proved to be unsustainable from an organisational viewpoint. Consequently, a fifth battalion was soon reinstated. Finally, in perhaps the largest change wrought by DOA to the land force, Army's disposition was shifted north resulting in two brigades in northern Australia, one in Townsville and another in Darwin.

Army's equipment did not stand still over this period. One of the earliest projects following the adoption of defence of Australia was the replacement of the 1950s era Centurion tanks with more modern Leopards in 1976. Other key projects included the partial replacement and augmentation of the Vietnam era Iroquois helicopter fleet by far more capable Blackhawk helicopters in the late 1980s and the enhanced mobility and protection provided by the acquisition of US Light Armoured Vehicles in the early 1990s. Throughout this period the Army Reserve remained large – fluctuating anywhere between 20,000 and 30,000 from the mid-1970s to the late-1990s – although poor equipping and variable participation hampered the effectiveness of this force.

Independent of the force structure is the question of preparedness of the ADF for action. Its hard to judge how prepared the force was in the 1970s and 1980s but there is ample evidence to suggest that by the mid-1990s the force was far from ready to meet even the modest challenges of short-warning conflict as outlined in DOA doctrine. Weapons stockholdings were small and only limited munitions were available for training. Much of Army and parts of Air Force were hollow in both equipment and personnel, even basic requirements like body armour were scarce. Navy alone was able to deploy quickly, but even then, their helicopters suffered from poor availability and incomplete mission systems, and there were significant gaps in the self-defence capabilities of Navy's frigates. Air Force (usually) maintained its scheduled flying hours but its maritime patrol, tactical fighter and strike fleets were missing many of the sub-systems needed to enable them to be used effectively or safely in anger. The important exception was the ready and willing C-130 Hercules transports, but even they lacked the basic self-protection systems needed for even moderate threat environments.

There were two reasons why this situation developed.

Firstly, it reflected the scale of the budget. Although defence spending grew by more than 30% in real terms between 1972 and 1985, from the mid-1980s onwards, a regime of 'zero-real-growth' saw the defence vote remain more-or-less static for the next fifteen years. Serious efforts were made in that period to free up resources for both investment and preparedness through various efficiency programs – first with Labour's 1990 Commercial Support Program, and then with the Coalition's 1997 Defence Efficiency Review and subsequent Defence Reform Program. Without these initiatives, the situation would have been much worse – left to its own devices,

Defence showed very little interest in efficiency. In any case, rising costs in all areas of defence spending soon outstripped the savings delivered by efficiency. As a result, both preparedness and investment suffered.

Secondly, poor preparedness was the result of decisions taken, and failed to be taken, within Defence on the allocation of resources. This was the era of the 'one line budget' where the department had considerable latitude in how it invested in new equipment, and also on the split between new investment and recurrent funding for the three Service. In turn, until 1997 at least, the three Services had a lot of freedom in how they allocated money across their various activities.

On the investment side, upgrades of platforms were often deferred in favour of further new acquisitions that aggravated the situation by being 'fitted for but not with'. Then, within the Services, inadequate attention was paid to meeting the demands of short-warning conflict (although Army did maintain a battalion-strength Ready Deployment Force). In fact, until towards the end of the decade, Defence paid scant attention to managing preparedness at all. Critically, there was no effective mechanism to link recurrent funding with the demands of preparedness. At the same time, logistics was given little priority in training, exercising and doctrine. Major exercises were undertaken with pre-arranged and often pre-positioned supplies. The focus was on maintaining 'core skills' rather than actually being ready for war. Put simply, the ADF was a peacetime force with all that implied.

Some of this reflects the strategic guidance of the day. The comforting assurance of warning time led to fitted-for-but-not-with platforms, and the drain of developing expensive capabilities like the Collins submarines unavoidably diverted money from preparedness. Nonetheless, DOA doctrine set demanding goals for short-warning conflict; the fact that Defence did not marshal their resources to deliver a proportion of the force at a higher level of preparedness was in part a choice they made, and in part a result of inadequate management of the issue. Their hands were not tied by strategic guidance.

It bears noting that, during much of the 1990s, the Government appears to have been unaware of the true state of the ADF's preparedness. Even as late as 1998, the Government was surprised and frustrated that neither of the ADF's combat aircraft – the F-111 bomber and the F/A-18 fighter – could responsibly be sent into action to support operation Desert Fox in Iraq.

Stepping forward again

In late 1997 the government released a declassified version of its strategic review entitled *Australia's Strategic Policy.* It marked a significant turning point in official strategic thinking. To begin, it presented a much more expansive vision of our strategic environment than before. While still acknowledging the special importance of our near neighbours including Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, it strengthened the message of the 1994 White Paper and argued that recent developments required a focus on the entire Asia-Pacific including the emerging power triangle of US-China-Japan.

But where it really got interesting was its inclusion of 'defending regional interests' as a secondary force structure determinant. By this was meant the ability to 'make a direct contribution to the maintenance of broader regional stability, in a future conflict in the Asia-Pacific region in which Australia's strategic interests were engaged'. However, in doing so, it embraced a decidedly maritime approach that failed to mention any possible the role by ground forces. In fact, a year later when new Army doctrine *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare* referred to 'expeditionary forces to support Australia's national interests offshore' it caused a degree of surprise in the media and consternation in some official circles.

As far as global strategic interests were concerned, the 1997 Review acknowledged that both the UN and US might make calls on us 'in actions to resists outright aggression elsewhere in the world' (this reactive language contrasts somewhat with the more proactive approach of recent years). But while it said that these needed to be as effective as possible, it stressed that 'the fact of a contribution – and often the speed with which it could be provided – would typically be more important than its precise form.' It also addressed global humanitarian and political interests – by which it meant peacekeeping operations. Here, it said (subject to with a long list of caveats) we would stand ready to assist. Neither global strategic nor humanitarian interests were accorded influence over the structure of the ADF.

Finally, there was a change to preparedness, or at least the Government directed a change to preparedness. Having said that we might deploy in support of broader regional stability or global interests, it argued that we could not assume that significant warning time would be available in either case. Consequently, adequate forces had to be held ready for such contingencies. What these forces might amount to was left unspecified, although it was made clear that not the entire ADF was entailed. This implied that the remainder of the ADF would still expand to meet the challenge of a major attack on Australia – a circumstance for which the concept of warning time still applied. However, in an important development, the 1997 Review rejected the long-held notion of developing capability 'fitted for but not with' the components necessary to fight.

Less than twenty-four months after *Australia's Strategic Policy* was released, its central proposition – that our interests in the region could require the use of armed force at short notice – was confirmed by the East Timor crisis. At the same time, the low priority accorded to land forces in regional operations was, at least in this instance, soundly disproved. In particular, the scale of land force deployment was much larger than had previously been considered. Indeed, East Timor was a major *joint* operation involving substantial land, sea and air elements built around a core of three Army battalions – a scale of deployment not seen since Vietnam.

While the various ADF deployments in the early 1990s were readily accommodated using the force structure developed for DOA, East Timor was a very close call that revealed just how poorly prepared the Army was. This is notwithstanding a scramble to boost the preparedness of the ADF earlier in the year which included the leasing of a fast catamaran for sea-lift and the elevation of the Darwin based 1st brigade to 28 days notice.

If the operation had been further away, if the Indonesians hadn't been so cooperative, or if we had not received so much support from our friends, then things may not have turned out as well as they did. Because the operation would not have proceeded without Indonesian concurrence, the biggest danger lay in them withdrawing cooperation part way through our deployment.

Soon after the initial deployment, the Government announced a temporary (later made permanent) increase to the strength of the ADF to sustain the operation. Air Force got an extra 550 personnel for deployable support and Army was authorised to increase its strength by 3,000 personnel to provide six full-time infantry battalions – effectively reversing the 1991 downsizing of Army by the Force Structure Review.

Little time was wasted in factoring in the lessons from East Timor in strategic policy. Less than a year later, and following a wide ranging public consultation, the Government released the 2000 Defence White Paper, *Defence 2000 – Our Future Defence Force*.

2000 Defence represented a further evolution, rather than a rejection, of the long-standing 'defence of Australia' doctrine. While retaining the core proposition of DOA, it was quite explicit in canvassing the types of military contributions we might make offshore in different circumstances. In doing so, it argued that our strategic interests, and the size of our likely military responses, diminish with distance from our continent. This was accomplished in five geographic steps.

Defence of Australia remained pre-eminent followed by the ability to make a 'major' contribution to the security of our immediate neighbourhood (essentially the old area of direct military interest), including helping our neighbours resist external aggression, and making the largest contribution to humanitarian and peacekeeping operations in that area. Only these first two priority tasks were accorded influence over the structure of the ADF.

Further afield, there was a descending hierarchy of tasks that would be accomplished from the forces developed for defending Australia and operations in the immediate region. In Southeast Asia we would want to make a 'substantial' contribution to regional coalitions, in the wider Asia Pacific a 'significant' contribution, and beyond the Asia Pacific a 'relatively modest contribution to any wider UN or US-led coalition'.

The evolution was significant in at least two ways. First, the Army was accorded a high priority role offshore for the first time since at least 1987. This was done by adding to the traditional requirement for air and naval forces to 'deny our air and sea approaches' the new demand for land forces to 'operate as part of a joint force to control the approaches to Australia and respond effectively to any armed incursion on to Australian territory'. It was also acknowledged that land forces would be able to contribute 'substantially to supporting the security of our immediate neighbourhood' including by assisting our neighbours to resist external aggression. Further afield, although land force contributions were possible, it was expected that they would only be deployed in lower intensity (low risk) operations and that air and naval capabilities would be sent in the event of a high intensity conflict.

Second, preparedness was boosted. One of the clear lessons from East Timor was that strategic crises can arise quickly and unexpectedly, and that the character of such events can be very difficult to anticipate. Despite moves in March 1999 to raise the preparedness of the ADF in response of the emerging situation, deficiencies in equipment, doctrine and especially logistics were still apparent in September when the operation occurred. To correct this, *Defence 2000* said that the entire defence force should be made up of 'fully developed capability' thereby rejected the strategy of maintaining an embryonic 'core force' for slow mobilisation and expansion. Moreover, it set demanding preparedness goals for the ADF and for the land forces in particular: the ability to deploy and sustain a brigade offshore while retaining a battalion group in reserve for rapid deployment.

In addition, *Defence 2000* reaffirmed the importance of regional military engagement and peacetime cooperation. This has been a strong theme in Australian strategic policy for decades. It was an investment that was paid back many times over in East Timor, through effective cooperation with our coalition partners and, critically, with the Indonesian military on the ground.

Defence 2000 had at its core a decade-long program of new capital investment that had been developed through close collaboration between Defence and the Government. It included the projects needed to maintain the existing capabilities of the ADF – essentially a replacement program – as well as those needed (predominately in the area of the land force) for an expanded role in the immediate region, the 'inner-arc enhancements', as they were known.

To support this program, the Government committed itself to a decade of 3% per annum real increases to defence spending. This addressed not just the funding of the investment program but also redressed budget pressures in personnel and logistics as well as covering the operating costs of future capabilities.

Defence 2000 received bipartisan support and broad public acceptance. In part at least, because it followed the usual practice of preparing to fight the last war. And unlike Vietnam, East Timor had been a popular and successful enterprise.

But while preparing for the last war is a popular strategy, it rarely works. To paraphrase Mark Twain; history seldom repeats itself, and this time it was not even going to rhyme.

The day everything changed

The tragic attacks of September 2001 in New York and Washington revealed a terrorist threat much more serious than previously understood and set off a series of events that are still playing out. That threat, and those events, continues to influence Australian strategic thinking and action.

In the immediate days after 9/11 the focus was on action. Australia invoked the ANZUS alliance and the Government committed around 1,100 personnel to the US-led War on Terror including two maritime patrol aircraft, two air-to-air refuelling aircraft, a two-vessel naval task group, four F/A-18 fighter aircraft, and additional

frigate and a Special Forces squadron. Not since Vietnam had such a diverse range of assets been deployed in support of a foreign-led coalition operation (although the number of personnel involved was commensurate to the battalion group sent to Somalia in 1992).

Although the risk of casualties was very real in both cases, the scale of the commitment stands in contrast to that made in 1991 to the first Gulf War – especially when you remember that in 2001 we still had 1,500 personnel in East Timor. There are probably several reasons for this. Arguably, our interests were more directly engaged by the Al Qaeda terrorist threat than in liberating Kuwait a decade earlier, and the exceptional nature of the 9/11 attacks generated a level of public support much higher than in 1991. More interesting for us, are the two factors pointing to underlying trends; the ADF was much better prepared to make a broader contribution, and more importantly, the government's had greater confidence in the use of armed force.

This confidence was reflected in the sending of Special Forces into the fray, effectively redefining what was meant by a niche contribution. Although a squadron of Special Forces had been sent to the Gulf in support of the US-led operation Desert Fox in early 1998, their role was search and rescue not long range patrol and, as it turned out, they were never used. Today, Special Forces have effectively become the 'force of choice' for coalition operations.

Even before operations in Afghanistan were brought to a rapid and successful conclusion, the Government also moved to improve our counter-terrorism capabilities. Over time, initiatives came to include expansion of national intelligence agencies, improved whole-of-government coordination, public awareness campaigns and a raft of new legislation. In addition, the ADF's capability to respond to domestic terrorist incidents was substantially increased.

A war of ideas

After Afghanistan, strategists abroad and at home scrambled to make sense of what the 9/11 attacks meant and to ask what should be done beyond the obvious responsive and defensive measures that were already in hand. Here in Australia, a second concurrent line of debate had already emerged in the weeks after the attacks. At its core, was the question: To what extent does the defence of Australian doctrine still made sense? This was not a new debate, the White Paper public consultation openly canvassed this question, and the possibility of restructuring the ADF for peacekeeping had arisen as the early 1990s following a series of peacekeeping operations around that time (once again the tendency to fight the last war).

The debate was given new impetus in mid-2002 by the Defence Minister in an address to an international audience at the Australian Defence and Strategic Studies Course when he said *"It probably never made sense to conceptualise our security interests as a series of diminishing concentric circles around our coastline, but it certainly does not do so now."* This was the speech that launched a thousand op-ed columns, notwithstanding that even a casual reading of the rest of the speech reveals a measured position that far from rejected the framework of *Defence 2000.*

The debate has been, and continues to be, wide-ranging and at times heated. It's sufficient for our purposes to highlight the two key themes. Firstly, the proposition that a profound change has occurred that erodes the importance of geography in our strategic calculus. Secondly, that for more than thirty years our strategic doctrine has focused too much on the remote and unlikely prospect of directly defending Australia at the expense of real-world demands, and moreover, that it is in danger of continuing to do so.

The argument for profound change has at its core the spectre of global Islamist terrorism which, it is argued by some, represents a truly grave and perhaps even existential threat to the West. Especially so, when it's coupled with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and failed or rouge states. Moreover, it's argued that most future conflicts will be qualitatively different to old-style conventional wars, with some suggesting that the likelihood of state-on-state conventional conflict is in terminal decline.

The implications that have been drawn from this for the roles and capabilities of the ADF vary. Although most of those arguing for change say that the situation is far from at the margins, as Alan Dupont put it in November 2002 in an address to the Menzies centre; *'There is a serious mismatch between strategy, force structure and the emerging threats to Australia's security.'* Some argue for a greater emphasis on peace-keeping and nation-building. Others want to see the ADF develop the ability to deploy more capable fighting forces in support of coalition operations anywhere around the globe. The boldest, suggest that Australia should substantially reduce it's investment in high-tech conventional weapons – like the Joint Strike Fighter – to fund the necessary new (though unspecified) capabilities. All have one thing in common – a rejection of the strict geographic determinism that underlies the defence of Australia doctrine. The argument is that as the forces of globalisation and technology bring the world closer together, geography is becoming increasingly less relevant than in the past.

The second theme of the debate questions the priority accorded to defending Australia against a territorial attack as opposed to being ready to meet the demands of more likely and increasingly frequent off-shore deployments. While the argument embraces all three services, at its heart is the gripe that over the last fifteen years Army has repeatedly deployed off-shore while only really earning the right to factor such deployments into their force structure following East Timor. Of course, that was before *Defence 2000* made large land force operations in the immediate region a force structure determinate.

So, what remains to be done? To quote the Chief of Army, Peter Leahy from a speech in November 2002, *"What I propose is that we provide government with an option to be able to operate away from our bases, and conduct a wide variety of tasks. How far away essentially becomes an issue for government to direct and for us to provide the appropriate amount of fuel to the transport platforms that will get us there."* He went on to explain that this would imply changes not just to Army, but also to the other two services that would form a joint force to work with the land component. However, without further refinement, this said little about the future roles and tasks of the ADF beyond suggesting that they should expand.

The global threat pays a visit

Although there was an active debate on strategy in defence and academic circles in late 2002, it was but a whisper compared to the growing public clamor over the question of Iraq. This came to consume the time and attention of the media, commentators and, we can only assume, the Government. But while we all sat captivated by the unfolding diplomatic machinations in Washington and New York, Islamist terrorists attacked us in our own backyard.

Bali dismissed any lingering doubts that Islamist terrorism directly engages our vital national interests. Just as importantly, it showed that it practice, as in definition, any global threat will manifest locally. The government lost no time in redoubling its efforts in the region to help our neighbors deal with the terrorist threat. This took many forms, but the close relationship forged in the immediate aftermath between the Australian Federal Police and Indonesian authorities is perhaps the most important. At home, the Bali bombing led to still further resources being allocated to our intelligence agencies.

A statement

In February 2003, the government moved to clarify its position through the release of a statement in the form of a short booklet titled *Australia's National Security – A Defence Update 2003.* This was the culmination of a strategic review process that had begun before 9/11. Most of the Update is a measured and unexceptional survey of three areas that are said to have changed significantly since the 2000 – terrorism, WMD proliferation and problems in the region (especially the immediate region). In each case the message was that we face new challenges that may result in military action. Beyond that, it emphasised the resolve of the US to take action, and highlighted the consequences of 'Washington pursuing a purposeful agenda' for world affairs and Australia in particular. There are two points worthy of note.

First, while reaffirming that 'the principles set out in the Defence White Paper remain sound', it argued that due to a number of factors, including US willingness to act, the likelihood of a direct military attack on Australia had fallen since 2000, at the same time as new threats had emerged. The conclusion was that for 'the foreseeable future, any ADF operations are likely to occur within the context of regional contingencies, the War on Terror, efforts to counter the proliferation of WMD or to otherwise enhance global security and stability.'

Second, as a consequence, it said that there needed to be a rebalancing of ADF capabilities and priorities. In doing so, it said that the 'rebalancing will not fundamentally alter the size, structure and roles of the Defence Force, but it will inevitably result in increased emphasis on readiness and mobility, on interoperability, on the development and enhancement of important new capabilities and, where sensible and prudent, a reduced emphasis on capabilities of less importance.' No hint was given as to what these capabilities might be.

The first point is unexceptional. Defending against direct attacks on Australia has always been acknowledged as the least likely possibility. The second point, however, is more interesting. It implies that the structure of the ADF will henceforth be influenced by a wider (though unspecified) range of tasks than that set out in *Defence 2000*. Moreover, it implies a trade-off between capabilities for the direct defence of Australia in favour of those needed to meet more immediate demands. We'll return to this point in the next chapter.

On balance, the *Defence Update 2003* alludes to little more than a further evolution of the defence of Australian doctrine. In the process, it leaves a lot of latitude as to what the rebalancing might entail. Nonetheless, it sets a clear limit on the contributions that Australia might make to future coalition operations in terms of *'important* niche capabilities' [my italics] benchmarked against those sent to Afghanistan and planned at that time for Iraq.

Invasion & intervention

Australia's decision to join the US-led coalition to invade Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein fractured more than 30 years of bipartisan agreement on national security in this country. But, with one exception, the matters raised are separate to those with which we are concerned here. By and large, the debate over whether or not to join the coalition fell well within the latitude afforded by existing Australian strategic policy, and for that matter, any sensible future policy. No government would want to narrow their freedom of action by, for example, making military action contingent upon an explicit UN Security Council mandate.

The exception is that the invasion of Iraq marked a significant lowering of the threshold for the use of armed force by the US. It reflected the sentiment of the US National Security Strategy from September 2002 which expanded the traditional notion of pre-emption by 'adapt[ing] the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries.' It saw the US being proactive rather than responsive, and critically, it set regime change as a goal. Moreover, it did so at a time when many governments, including several of the larger ones in Europe, firmly rejected the proposition.

There is no way to pretend that this was not a substantial departure from at least the last several decades of US strategic policy. Consider the contrast with the 1991 Gulf war and its carefully limited war aims, or the selective use of force to achieve results in the Balkans in the late 1990s. Put simply, the invasion of Iraq showed that the US no longer equates stability with security and consequently, they do not see the status quo as a default goal. It is willing to use military force to profoundly shape the strategic environment in circumstances well short of responding to aggression. Our involvement in the invasion marks a similar shift in our own policy. How enduring a shift this is remains to be seen. Perhaps it all begins and ends with the exceptional circumstances of Iraq. Only time will tell will if this was a watershed or a mere aberration in US policy.

Although the invasion of Iraq was a qualitatively different event to Afghanistan (or for that matter any post-Vietnam coalition operation we've been involved in), our contribution followed the pattern set in Afghanistan in late 2001. A diverse package

of capabilities involving some 2,000 personnel was sent. But, while the types of capability sent were similar to those deployed two years earlier, a greater range of our forces saw action than before. But, unlike Afghanistan, we were unable to make a clean disengagement post-conflict and around 300 personnel remained in Iraq along with another 500 beyond Iraq's borders.

No sooner had hostilities ended in Iraq, than the Government mounted an AFP-led 'cooperative intervention' to the Solomon Islands following a request from their government. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was centred on an AFP contingent of 200 personnel and included contributions from a number of our South-Pacific neighbours. Around 1,400 ADF personnel were dispatched to provide logistics support and security to the operation. It's important that the ADF only had a supporting role (which has since been largely supplanted by private contractors). This reflects the practicality of nation building, which is likely to see the AFP as the key new capability in future similar circumstances.

This was not the first time in recent history that Australia had become engaged in the South West Pacific. In the early 1990s an attempt was made to mediate a solution to the rebellion on Bougainville, and then a longer lasting and ultimately successful commitment was made to resolve that crisis following a New Zealand initiative in 1997. Very significant also, was the extensive PNG drought relief operation in 1999 that brought food to more than half a million people. And the 1997 Sandline crisis saw Australia move decisively to divert a mercenary arms shipment to PNG.

Nevertheless, RAMSI represented a much bolder level of engagement than had previously been the case. In fact, the Foreign Affairs White Paper of late 2002 and the Defence Update of early 2003 had effectively ruled out closer Australian involvement in Solomon Islands. And as it turned out, RAMSI was only the first step towards closer engagement with the South West Pacific that has since been extended to both Nauru and Papua New Guinea. In a very real sense, Australia has taken the initiative to shape its local security landscape for the better.

Its probably coincidental that we changed policy in the South West Pacific after the US had moved decisively to shape the global security environment. Nonetheless, the US precedent undercut any niggling counter-argument that might have been mounted against intervention. At the end of the day, RAMSI reflected a continuing trend in Australian South West Pacific policy bolstered by our increasing confidence and willingness to take action.

Rebalancing the force

In mid-2002 the Government commenced a Defence Capability Review to examine current and future planned ADF capabilities in light of changed strategic circumstances. This was a major force structure review like the one undertaken prior to the 1987 White Paper and then again in 1991. Its results were released in a three-page statement in late 2003. This was then followed up with a revised ten-year Defence Capability Plan (DCP) in early 2004. Together, these documents reflect the 'rebalancing of capabilities and priorities' promised in *Defence Update 2003*.

Some care must be taken in interpreting the results. First, budget pressures, and especially rapidly rising costs in the DCP, have had a big impact on the planned schedule of equipment acquisition. As has the inability of Defence and industry to deliver acquisition projects; more than $2 billion dollars in planned investment has been deferred to past 2008 because the money simply cannot be spent as fast as first anticipated. Second, the explanation given for the changes is very meagre and we are left to infer the thinking behind what has been done.

The Government's statement announced that Army was to get replacement tanks ($550 million) to give the land force the combat weight needed for combined arms operations along with a rapid acquisition of combat identification for land forces ($225 million) and more capable communications and night vision equipment. Later, we learned that the money allocated for new artillery had been doubled (to around $675 million). And in a move directly relevant to the employment of the land force, plans for replacement amphibious vessels around 2010 were revised upwards. The new vessels will be more than three times larger than those currently in service, and twice the size of the vessels planned for back in 2000.

At the same time, there were cuts to Navy that will take effect over the next several years. Two of the six recently acquired mine hunting vessels will be layed up and the two oldest of our six FFG frigates will be retired early as newer (though less capable) Anzac frigates enter service over the next couple of years. Originally, the plan was to keep all six FFG frigates until the arrival of the Air Warfare Destroyer in 2013. This is a reduction in the *scale* of traditional DOA-type capabilities (especially the mine hunters) to release money for other purposes. Nonetheless, the total financial savings from these two decisions are, in Defence terms, modest; only around $104 million per annum will be saved in reduced operating and personnel costs. In part at least, this money will help fund an upgrade to the air-defence capabilities of the bremaining FFG frigates ($525 million) and the eventual acquisition of new Air Warfare Destroyers next decade, the cost of which had increased by more than a billion dollars since 2000.

In Air Force, the planned withdrawal of the F-111 strike aircraft has been brought forward from 2020 to 2010. Although this will release around $143 million per annum in personnel and operating costs (and at least a further $300 million in foregone upgrades) it almost certainly resulted from fears that the aircraft cannot practically, or cost-effectively, be kept in service any longer. Indeed, substantial extra money was allocated to equip the F/A-18 fighters and AP-3C maritime patrol aircraft with a strike capability to fill the gap before the arrival of the Joint Strike Fighter next decade.

These are just the headline items, many smaller, but nonetheless important changes were also made in the revised DCP, like the curious decision to remove the project for ground-based air-defence.

At the risk of oversimplifying the Review's impact on the force structure, three things occurred. Firstly, air capabilities have been maintained albeit through a different equipment path. Secondly, naval resources have been focused into a marginally smaller number of higher capability surface combatants. Thirdly, the land force gains combat weight and a boosted amphibious deployment capability. The first two points are unexceptional; in no way do they even hint at stepping back from the core DOA

task of denying our air and maritime to an adversary. The changes to the land force and amphibious lift are more interesting. They point to an expansion of the role of Army beyond that set in Defence 2000. It remains to be seen exactly what that might be.

Where does this leave us?

In recent days, the defence of Australia doctrine has been called everything from anachronistic and failed to defunct and thoroughly discredited. But before we sound the last post on a policy that's prevailed for more than thirty years, let's look at what we know.

If we take the Government at its word, what we have is a further evolution of the thirty-year old self-reliant defence of Australia doctrine. To put it figuratively, the concentric circles are still in place, but a higher priority is now accorded to the outer annulus than before. The core proposition – that Australia must have the self-reliant military capability to defend itself against a credible conventional attack – remains in place. But, continuing a trend begun in 1997, it is now less the exclusive determinant of the size and composition of our defence force than was previously the case. How much less is difficult to judge, we are yet to learn whether participation in global coalitions has, or will, influence the structure of the ADF.

In terms of concrete initiatives, the biggest change is the boost to the capabilities needed for combined arms ground warfare and amphibious operations. Yet where such capabilities might be employed, and to what ends, remains unsaid. Part of the problem is that Government has not been forthcoming with explanations. The eighteen month long 2003 Defence Capability Review resulted in a scant three page public statement (and even *Defence Update 2003* only weighed in at a mere 25 pages). In comparison, the thirteen month long 1986 *Dibb Review* delivered an extensive 173 page public report. No matter what criticisms might be levelled at the 1980s conception of DOA, a lack of transparency is not one of them.

One area where there is little uncertainty is the continuing drive to make the ADF more ready and sustainable that commenced with *Defence 2000*. Since 2000, additional money has gone to both logistics (more than $2 billion in extra funding) and war stocks ($775 million) and projects are now in train to remediate the last of the fitted-for-but-not-with platforms in the ADF.

The contributions made to recent coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate a higher level of commitment, and greater tolerance for risk, than in the past. Nonetheless, the focus has been on air and maritime capabilities largely avoiding 'boots on the ground' with the exception of Special Forces. And its important to keep the scale and duration of the deployments in context, we are a very long way from the situation in the 1970s where we maintained a sizable task force in Vietnam for more than 4 years.

The recent decision to dispatch 450 troops to Iraq to assist with security stretches but does not break the proposition of 'niche', even though we don't have an exit date. But the deployment only occurred after the Government received strong representations from our friends and allies for help. Importantly, this was not something that the

Government intended doing even a short time ago. Consequently, it is not so much a reflection of our policy, but an exception to it brought on by circumstances. Put simply, we have become embroiled.

There is another possibility; that over the last four years the Government has made the contributions it could, rather then the contribution it wanted to, because the ADF was unable to do more. On the surface, there is little evidence to support this. Although the ADF has been busy in recent years, it does not bear comparison with the burden shouldered by the US. We have not mobilised the reserve; they have. We have six-month individual rotations; they have twelve. If the Government had wanted the ADF to play an earlier, or larger, role in post-conflict security operations in Iraq, they could have. The fact that we are now sending a force (albeit a small one) proves that we could have done more.

The Government's desire, and the ADF's capacity, to make a conventional land force contribution to the actual invasion is more difficult to judge. If we had been willing to play a secondary role behind the armoured push to Bagdad, there is little doubt that we could have made a conventional ground force contribution – say a battalion group fulfilling the need for protection of vital assets and supply lines. But then we might have had difficulty extricating the force once hostilities ended. Perhaps the Government wanted something more consistent with the model that we were only there for the 'heavy lifting' which, for a while at least, excused us from a larger post-conflict security. If they were looking for a larger and more capable conventional ground contribution for high-intensity operations they would have been disappointed, as highlighted by the confusion in mid-2002 over whether we possess an armoured brigade or not. (As in the 1990s, it still appears that the Government is not across what it has, and does not have, at its disposal.).

If this is the case, then the decision, post-hostilities, in Iraq to harden and network the Army takes on a different character, notwithstanding that the statement accompanying the 2003 Defence Capability Review reaffirmed that defence of Australia and regional interests remain the prime drivers of the force structure. Could it be that we are drifting towards getting ready to fight the last war, this time Iraq?

What's next?

O the past thirty years, Australian strategic policy has evolved as the world has changed. The three key events being, the end of the cold in 1990, East Timor in 1999 and, arguably, the attacks of 9/11 in 2001. So far, none of these have caused a shift anywhere near as radical as when forward defence became untenable in the late 1960s.

But fundamental shifts can take a while. It took four years for the 1976 White Paper to be written, another eleven years for the principles to be translated into concrete force structure priorities in 1987, and a further decade before Army produced a plan to re-structure itself for short-warning conflict in 1997.

Consequently, we cannot discount that the post-9/11 world is moving us towards a much larger change than has so far become apparent. The uncertainty over the Government's thinking and their reticence to produce a White Paper – despite calls

from numerous quarters to do so – only reinforces this possibility. Certainly some pundits are arguing that a more radical departure is due.

In the meantime, much is at stake. Without clear strategic guidance it's impossible to have disciplined development of the ADF. The danger is that without a long-term statement of our strategic priorities, immediate concerns will skew the allocation of billions of investment dollars that will takes years to deliver any capability and will remain in the force structure for two or three decades.

Ask yourself this, if a billion dollars became available tomorrow to boost ADF capabilities, how would it best be spent? An additional Collins-class submarine to help deny our maritime approaches to an adversary, an extra amphibious vessel to help deploy and sustain our land forces in the region, or a couple of C-17 aircraft to give us rapid strategic reach anywhere around the globe? The fact is we have no clear guidance on where our priorities should be. At best, recent Government decisions represent an 'emergent strategy' whose trajectory is difficult to discern.

With this in mind, we turn now to examine the four interlinked factors upon which any shift in policy will depend: the role of geography, the scale of out-of-region operations, the nexus between our interests and identity, and the future role of Army.

Geography and rhetoric

Officially at least, the ADF is being structured to accomplish two highly interdependent tasks. First, defending Australia from conventional attack including everything from countering an invasion to ensuring that no one can extract political concessions from us through military force. Second, making a major contribution to the security of the immediate neighbourhood including the dispatch of land forces beyond our shores. It's planned that the capabilities needed to support our interests further afield will be drawn from the forces maintained for these two priority tasks, with the size of our commitment diminishing with distance from our region.

This is 'defence of Australia' circa 2000. It remains overtly geographic in its conception of priorities for the ADF.

It must be conceded from the start, that Australia's thirty year long strategic preoccupation with self-reliant defence is out of step with the approach of most other Western nations. Europe has long ago embraced a collective approach to defence underpinned by close economic and political union. The UK has effectively turned over its conventional force structure to the demands of providing contributions to international coalitions. New Zealand has done something similar but with far less vigour. In fact, it's hard to think of another Western nation that lays awake at night worrying about war coming to its shores (but equally hard to think of an Asian nation that doesn't).

Moreover, the notion of self-reliant defence does not accord at all with our military history. As has been observed many times during the debate; almost without exception Australia has operated offshore as a partner in a coalition – from the Boar War to Iraq. In fact, until the middle of World War II, Australia mainly provided 'plug and play' naval and land forces for integration into the British military. For

those that ascribe to the notion of a national 'strategic culture', the last thirty years have seen a fundamental disconnect between Australia's strategic rhetoric and military practice. To quote a study entitled *The Tyrrany of Dissonance: Australia's Strategic Culture and Way of War, 1901-2005* by the Army's Land Warfare Centre's Michael Evans; '*The offshore character of the Australian way of war is an enduring feature of national strategic culture in times of war and crisis…*'

So was the defence of Australia doctrine an aberration? Did the shock of failure in Vietnam and the exit of our allies from South East Asia cause us to fall back to prepare for an attack that was never going to come?

I don't think so, nor do I think that any Australian government is likely to abandon defence of Australia in the near future. Our strategy, like that of most other nations, is a product of our strategic geography.

Moreover, I do not think there is any contradiction between involvement in offshore coalition operations and a policy that gives priority to geographically focused self defence. Remember, even in 1987, self-reliance was only ever deemed feasible in the context of a strong US alliance – an alliance that brought with it responsibilities that would invariably take us offshore.

To understand why a self-reliant and geographical conception of security has been at the heart of our strategic doctrine for over thirty years, it's enough to consider under what circumstance we might forego the capacity to defend ourselves and assist our immediate neighbours to do so. There are two possibilities. First, if we have sufficient confidence in the willingness and capacity of others to do the job. Second, if the risk of conventional attack or military coercion is deemed to be so unlikely that it can be ignored.

Relying on others for our defence is a difficult proposition to sustain. Alliances are about mutual support not one-sided dependence. The least we can offer an ally is the ability to defend ourselves and make a major contribution to the security of our immediate neighbourhood. The carefully circumscribed contributions from both the US and UK to the Australian-led INTERFET operation in East Timor in 1999 shows what is expected of us by way of self-reliance (and what we can expect in support).

And even if some accommodation could be reached with – let's be realistic – the US, we would still have no assurance when the time came. Even with the best of will, nations can find themselves unable to help their friends, as happened with the UK in 1942. Moreover, while the US may be the world's sole hyper-power, recent events in Iraq have shown just how easily their capacity for conventional warfare can be consumed. What would happen if our security hinged on the less-important of two simultaneous regional conflicts involving the US?

Circumstances could easily see us forced to look to ourselves when the time came. The situation would be different if we were nestled somewhere in Europe, or better still contiguous to the US like Canada. But we are neither. The security of the US, or indeed of any of the European powers, would not be fundamentally changed by our suffering strategic setback. We are the strategic approaches to nowhere.

While the argument for self-reliance is straightforward, the question of likelihood is more subtle. The accepted wisdom has always been that the probability of Australia facing a conventional conflict at home is very low. However, if Australia were to come under attack or military coercion, it would mean that one or more largely unforseen events had occurred, events whose likelihood we can only guess at. History is punctuated by just such events – like the end of the Cold War and 9/11.

So how unlikely would such an event have to be for the Government to make no advanced preparations to discharge its responsibility under s.119 of the Constitution to protect the States from attack – once in a hundred years, once in a thousand years? And, critically, does the likelihood of such an event fall above or below this threshold?

There is no scientific answer to this question; it's ultimately a matter of judgement. But, it's not hard to identify possible branching points that would significantly elevate the prospect of being involved in a conventional conflict at home or in our immediate region. There are at least two broad possibilities, both linked to our geographic location, and both highlighted as early as 1994 in *Defending Australia* as emerging post-Cold War concerns.

The first results from the emergence of military capabilities in South East Asia as economic development continues throughout in the region. To some extent, this is in abatement at present, but few would doubt the region's potential to grow and prosper as globalisation takes root. Indeed, it is our policy to encourage this for the common good. But as this occurs, we will find ourselves proximate to nations with increasingly capable defence forces. This heightens the consequence of a breakdown in good relations or of actions that might be inimical to our interests. How likely is this? Likely enough for a RAND corporation study for the US Army published in 2005 to have an 'alternative future' including an Islamist military take over of Indonesia in 2020.

The second, and more serious possibility, arises from the changing security balance in North Asia. In the long-term, the only thing that is certain is that the roles of China, Japan and the US are inexorably evolving as China grows in economic and military power and Japan edges towards a more normal strategic posture. Add to this the aggravations of Taiwan and the Korean peninsula, and you can see the potential for drastic and rapid change.

The situation could play out in many ways; one dire result could be that the US ends up disengaging from the region. The consequences of such a development for Australia would be particularly serious precisely because of our geography. The withdrawal of US forces from South East Asia was a turning point for Australian strategic thinking in the early 1970s – a US withdrawal from North Asia would be an order of magnitude more serious. Is such a development impossible over the next twenty years? I wouldn't bet our sovereignty on it.

At some point in the future, the spread of prosperity, democracy and stability may make this all irrelevant, but this hardly seems in prospect. For the time being, there is no assurance that we will not face the challenge of defending ourselves or assisting

our immediate neighbourhood to do so. This, along with the sobering consequences of failure, has proved sufficient for successive Australian governments to allocate a sizable chunk of national treasure to the task. Encouraged, no doubt, by the belief that the surest way to invite a challenge to our sovereignty would be to fail to prepare for one.

The decision to have the capacity for defence self reliance is binary. We can either prevail against the sorts of capabilities that can be brought to bear against us or we can not. Consequently, as the perceived likelihood of such an event waxes and wains, there is no point in changing the investment in those capabilities until the likelihood falls below our threshold of caring, at which point we can declare a dividend for the taxpayer and join New Zealand. In the meantime, it simply makes no sense to be half prepared to prevail.

If these arguments are accepted, the maintenance of a self-reliant defence capability should remain the *non-negotiable core task* for our defence force. So far there is little sign that the Government is ready to walk away from this, either substantively or rhetorically. If they wanted to, they would have to find an alternative. Whatever it might be, it will take some selling. Defence of Australia represents the lowest common denominator politically and in public opinion. In 2000, the vast majority of those who participated in the White Paper public consultation process referred to the defence of Australia as the first and foremost role of the ADF.

However, even if defending Australia and operating in the immediate region remains the non-discretionary core of our strategic policy, this does not preclude other tasks further afield being accorded greater influence over the force structure than in the past. And, ultimately, it is the multi-billion dollar question of force structure that really matters. To the extent that the preparedness of the ADF has been actively managed in the past, offshore tasks have always taken into account.

Necessary but not sufficient

So what else does the ADF need to be able to do? As an integral part of our strategy, we need to be able to undertake those operations necessary to maintain our alliance with the US. Not only does the alliance deliver us access to technology, logistics support, a place under the nuclear umbrella and the (perhaps mixed blessing) of US intelligence. It also gives serious pause to any potential adversary. While we cannot afford to assume that US combat assistance will always be forthcoming, an adversary cannot afford to assume the contrary.

In the past, this has amounted to doing what was judged as necessary to pay our way as a US ally. Over the past four years, we have made larger contributions to US coalitions than in the past and the reasons for this have been canvassed earlier.

Of course, support for the US is never the exclusive reason for our involvement. We are unlikely, for example, to make anything more than a small contribution to US operations in the Caribbean, Latin America, or for than matter, in the Balkans region. It's only when we perceive that our national interests and those underpinning US actions are coincident, that we will make the sorts of contributions we did in

Afghanistan and Iraq. Similarly, when our interests are sufficiently engaged, we can become involved in military operations beyond our immediate region in the absence of US involvement. In either case, it's understood that there are practical limits on the scale of forces we can prudently deploy beyond our shores because we have challenges nearer to home. We may not be the deputy sheriff, but we don't run a bad neighbourhood watch.

The question is whether we need to be doing more to either maintain the alliance with the US or to protect our interests beyond what is provided for in our current planning? The former seems easy to answer. On the basis of our recent coalition contributions, the alliance is as strong as it's been for decades and we have a fast tracked US free-trade deal to prove it. Consequently, it's not surprising that the government has set the scale of future contributions against this benchmark. In terms of what we need to do for the alliance, there seems to be little cause for change at the moment. In fact, many have argued that, if competently done, we could have excused ourselves from Iraq and still maintained a healthy alliance.

In terms of having to do more to protect our national interests further afield, we return to the question of the so-called 'global threats' confronting the world. Here it's hard to mount a convincing case that we have to go beyond what we have done to date further afield. There are two Catch-22 observations to make.

First, to the extent that terrorism truly represents a dispersed global threat with tentacles into every corner of the globe, we don't have to travel far to play our part. The close cooperation we have with our neighbours on counter-terrorism, especially Indonesia, is an example of how we can think-globally and act-locally. The same is true of failing and failed states. Our efforts are best directed towards building capacity in our near region where our interests are most vitally engaged, our affinity with the people is strongest, and our potential to make a difference is real. That's why we are in Solomon Islands today and not Afghanistan, and that's why all our Memorandum of Understanding on counter-terrorism are with regional states.

Second, where a local threat emerges with potentially global consequences, such as WMD proliferation in North Korea or Iran, our interests are not engaged anywhere near to the extent that geographically closer nations are – that's why we are not part of the six party talks over Korea nor of the European initiative towards Iran. Moreover, our capacity to make a pivotal difference in either case is next to zero. Thus, as in Afghanistan and Iraq, if military action is taken in circumstances like this, there is no reason – from the point of view of our national interests – to make a larger contribution than we have in the recent past to global operations.

Thus, our national interests are adequately served by a strategy of focusing on the neighbourhood where they are both vitally engaged and unlikely to be met by others, while planning to make lesser contributions further afield where responsibility is shared with many nations and the tasks tend to be beyond our capacity to make a decisive contribution. So – returning now to the question of force structure – how well have the capabilities developed for defence of Australia met the demands of such a strategy?

In the broad, it appears that an adequate range of options was available to the Government for both Afghanistan and Iraq to do the job. However, in almost every case, some sort of rapid acquisition was necessary to enable the ADF to operate safely and effectively offshore. In 1991 the FFG frigates had to be fitted with close-in anti-missile weapons systems. In 2001 more than $170 million was spent for Afghanistan on everything from shoulder launched anti-armour missiles to upgrades for the F/A-18 fighters and P-3C maritime patrol aircraft, and an unspecified amount was expended to prepare for the invasion of Iraq. And we should not forget that in 1999-2000 around $190 million was spent on a range of equipment for East Timor including basic items like body armour.

However, in most cases these 'rapid response' acquisitions have had more to do with filling long-standing capability gaps that will, over time, be fixed as planned acquisitions and upgrades move the ADF from 'fitted-for-but-not-with' to 'fully developed capability' as directed by *Defence 2000*. Yet, even then, there will always remain some minor mission-unique requirements that will have to be met at short notice – this is unavoidable and a long way from an argument for restructuring the ADF for coalition operations.

Of course as a nation we can *choose* to play a larger role on the global stage than demanded by our national interests or the US alliance – simply because as a democracy we agree that it's the right thing to do. If we do, then we've crossed the line from protecting our interests to asserting our identity. To quote *The Australian's* Greg Sheridan from early 2005:

"The battle over the shape of our defence forces is really a metaphor for the battle over the future of Australia. Are we strong, self-confident, willing to take care of ourselves and capable of making a contribution globally or are we timid, frightened, inoffensive stay-at-homes who, pullulating timidly (as A.D. Hope put it), hope that history will never knock on our door?"

Interest and identity

The 1976 and 1987 Defence White Papers were highly realist in their language. Armed force was a tool to protect our national interests; full stop. But by 1994 some romance crept into the prose when the Keating government's White Paper said *'We are rightly proud of our Defence Force, which by its ideals and achievements over nearly a century has done so much to define our national identity'*. This was echoed by the Howard government in the 2000 White Paper *'Our armed forces are not simply a service provided by government. They are part of our national identity. The ADF reflects the kind of country we are, the role we seek to play in the world, and the way we see ourselves.'* In neither instance were these statements controversial because there was a broad bipartisan consensus on defence and strategic policy at the time.

Not only has this consensus been fractured in recent years, but the emphasis on identity has been ratcheted up within the national debate. The easiest way to see this is to compare the 1997 and 2003 Foreign Affairs White Papers and see how they deal with what is arguably the essence of national identity; values. In the earlier document values play a prominent role defined in terms of tolerance and liberal democratic

values. But by 2003, a much more expansive position is taken with 'perseverance and mateship' added to the list. In a passage reminiscent of C.E.W. Bean, it said:

> *Our fundamental values and beliefs are clear. Australians value tolerance, perseverance and mateship. These values form our spirit as a nation. They are evident in our readiness to pull together in times of adversity; in our defence, for more than one hundred years, of the freedoms we value; and in our social cohesion and national unity.*

In doing so, the 2003 Foreign Affairs White Paper identified contemporary Australian values with essentially those of the Anzac digger (a theme also expressed by the Chief of Army). This year the Government sent posters of Simpson and his donkey – the iconic image from the Gallipoli campaign – to every Australian school as part of promoting values.

Values were also invoked as a defining feature of our security relationships in the 2003 Foreign Affairs White Paper. It said that our security alliance with the US was a 'practical manifestation' of shared values and accorded a similar context to our security relationship with the United Kingdom. These statements reflect a persistent theme that has been repeated many times in the last several years. Moreover, it's noteworthy also that the Government has concluded that we are a target for international terrorism because *'because of the values we represent'*. If there was any doubt about the role of values in our strategic policy, in mid-2004 the Prime Minister made the following statement in the context of staying the distance in Iraq: *'I strongly believe, however, that a geographically cramped, value-free style of realism is dangerously complacent and contrary to Australia's interests at this critical hour.'*

What happened to the carefully measured realpolitique that underpinned post-WWII Australian strategic policy? A cynical view would be that any reference to values is hollow rhetoric designed to engender domestic support for military action for more pragmatic reasons. More likely, is that the Government mean what they say.

This does not imply that values, shared or otherwise, have become pre-eminent in our strategic calculus, far from it. In making the case for war recently, the Government argued most strongly on matters of national interest – terrorism in the case of Afghanistan and WMD in the case of Iraq – along with a pragmatic recognition of the strategic (rather than cultural) importance of the US alliance. So while values rate a mention, they are – for the moment at least – far from a determinant factor. Our national interests and identity are aligned but not yet conflated.

Moreover, so long as a large chunk of the Australian electorate remains sceptical about the prudence of US action, it's unlikely that invoking shared values will engender much support for elevated participation in US global operations. But perhaps this could change; consider the evolution of US strategy post-9/11. Initially at least, it was ostensibly about countering the threats of terrorism and WMD. While this remains important, increasing emphasis is being given to promoting and spreading freedom and democracy.

This needs to be viewed carefully - there are pragmatic limits. Nobody has yet proposed an emu-bob of sub-Saharan Africa to rid the continent of despots. Nor is

much pressure likely to be brought to bear in Pakistan to force an election. Nonetheless, just as the US has become more proactive in shaping its security environment, it's equally clear that – where feasible – freedom and democracy have become collateral goals when action is taken. In part this is argued as a bulwark against the spread of ideas inimical to US interests, but it also stands as a promotion of US values as an end in itself.

Of course we are yet to see where the US experiment goes. Although Iraq is looking less bad than a year ago, and encouraging signs have emerged elsewhere in the middle-east, problems could still arise. But if things go well, it would embolden the US to be even more proactive in pursuing their interests and promoting their values.

Would this encourage Australians to sign-up and use armed force as an expression of values and national identity rather than a carefully rationed tool for safeguarding our national interests? My judgement is an emphatic no. We are far too skeptical and level headed a nation to make so light a use of our blood and treasure.

But if I am wrong, and we were to choose to play an expanded role, we would then have to decide how to deliver larger contributions to global coalition operations. The alternatives would be to expand the ADF or hold less reserve at home against the possibility of local contingencies. At the same time, we would also need to look at whether additional capabilities needed to be developed specifically for such operations.

In the debate so far, the issue of larger contributions to coalitions has centered on the role of our land forces. This is not surprising, recent experience with coalition operations has shown, that there is no substitute for boots on the ground. And if there is one part of the ADF's force structure that we have been hesitant to deploy on such operations it is our ground forces.

It's the Army stupid!

In recent years, a lurid story has been told of the hijacking of Australian strategic policy by civilian bureaucrats 'who improperly ignored, over-rode or excluded professional military advice to governments'. Whatever the reality of this oft told tale might be, it's a thing of the past; the Minister made clear with the release of the Defence Capability Review in 2003, that he's relying heavily on the advice of the Service Chiefs in rebalancing the ADF to meet the new security environment.

So where does their advice lead? Put simply, the ADF is re-establishing the expeditionary land force capability it lost thirty years ago. This is really what the strategic policy debate has been about from the day it started. And understandably so; if there has been a failure of strategic policy in the last thirty years it has been that it took too long to recognise the need to shake off the post-Vietnam continental focus of our land force and acknowledge that they will deploy offshore.

Defence 2000 provided the capability enhancements necessary for Timor-like land operations, and set as a preparedness goal the deployment and sustainment an essentially light infantry brigade group offshore. But since then, Army has set the bar

higher – not in scale but in intensity. Their intent is to develop a 'Hardened and Networked Army' that can employ a combined arms approach whereby infantry, armour, artillery, aviation and engineers work together to support and protect each other

In effect, the goal is now to deploy and sustain a combined arms brigade group. Given the size of the Army, it would be based around two battalion-strength manoeuvrer units. Added to this would be tanks, artillery, personnel carriers, infantry mobility vehicles, combat and construction engineers, communications, air defence, armed reconnaissance helicopters, rotary-lift transport and a host of other various support elements. The exact composition would depend on the task at hand, and will involve anywhere between 3,000 and 6,000 troops.

While this brigade group will be able to operate across the 'full spectrum of conflict', it falls short of the mythical armoured brigade for several reasons including that, even after the Abrams purchase, we will still possess too few tanks. Nonetheless it will be a formidable force, Army's catch cry being 'harder to hit, and harder hitting'.

From an organisational point of view, we are not simply talking here about a single brigade. To sustain a force like this requires three such units (one to deploy, one preparing to deploy and one reconstituting after deployment). In effect, the entire permanent Army will be bent towards the goal of enabling this task, with lesser roles and tasks drawn from within this force as needed. Of course, for shorter periods of time it would also be possible to deploy a larger force – say a brigade with three battalion-strength manoeuvrer units – but we will not be able to sustain it for more than twelve months (using six month long rotations).

At the same time, the ADF is developing the joint capability for amphibious operations to allow projection of a chunk of the 'networked and hardened' land force over the sea. The scenario, as described in Hansard on 11 March 2005 to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), deserves close examination. It is the most detailed explanation we have of how Army's developing amphibious capability will be used. Here's my paraphrasing of what's envisaged:

Australian submarines deploy forward to clear choke points of enemy vessels prior to the egress of the soon to arrive flotilla. Air Warfare Destroyers and Frigates create a protective bubble around two amphibious vessels carrying the embarked land forces as they move together towards their target. If within range of land based air protection, RAAF fighters will be flying combat air patrol over the fleet. Under cover of night, and from over the horizon, a company group is simultaneous lifted ashore by a dozen helicopters from the two vessels. The vessels then close with the coast and using a combination of the twelve helicopters and eight landing craft the remainder of the force moves ashore along with their tanks, armoured vehicles and other equipment. At the end of the operation, a battalion group landing party of around 1,200 troops has secured an entry point.

This scenario has three key characteristics. Firstly, it says that we are operating against an adversary with sufficient sea, air and land capabilities to demand a comprehensive response using our most sophisticated and lethal air and maritime

platforms. Secondly, this is an opposed operation involving some level of forced entry onto foreign soil. Thirdly, the end result is that we have deposited a relatively small force onto the ground. Moreover, since our amphibious capacity has been fully employed to achieve even this modest result, it will be some time before further Australian land forces arrive.

But even if we were to lodge a full combined arms brigade onto a foreign shore, its ability to control ground would be limited. For example, in Vietnam where we sent a combined arms task force of 4,500 in 1966, the tactical area of responsibility was a mere 25km by 16km. This shows that even a brigade strength force can only be applied in anger to a very small target if it's involved in close combat. Of course, this same force can also undertake less demanding cooperative humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping tasks over a larger (but still not extensive) area. For example, on the basis of experience in East Timor it could lead a regional coalition and provide sufficient troops to secure an area of around 60km by 120km against a very dispersed and low level threat. But this is something that our current light infantry capability can already do

The combined arms brigade and the battalion group amphibious lift capabilities represent big jumps from the goals of *Defence 2000*. The change from being able to deploy a brigade to circumstances akin to East Timor to one demanding a 'networked and hardened' combined arms land force, explains the extra funds committed to the land force post-2000 for tanks, artillery and combat identification. Similarly for the amphibious capability, that has seen the planned amphibious vessels double in size, the additional troop lift helicopters more than double in price, and a greater emphasis put on the Air Warfare Destroyer's escort role.

We are yet to be told what this seemingly formidable force is for. The best strategic rationale we have comes from aforementioned testimony to the JSCFADT when a Defence official justified the proposed amphibious vessels with reference to land force deployments to *both* our immediate region and to coalition operations further afield. This says something interesting about what now constitutes a 'force structure determinant' but not much about where exactly this force might be sent or about its role.

The goal of a 'Hardened and Networked Army' is set out Army's draft Future Land Operational Concept, *Complex Warfighting* [1]. However, this document does not provide too many solid pointers. It describes a location-free operating environment that is dominated by the twin drivers of globalisation and US military dominance. In fact, about the only substantive references to geography (or for that matter, strategic policy) are to observe that *'National security concepts based on geographical theories such as the 'air-sea gap' or the concentric circles of the 1980s 'defence in depth' concept are hence not applicable to Australia's circumstances.'* and that '*Configuring land forces purely for operation inside Australia or the immediate region is therefore unviable, as it leave us vulnerable to attacks from 'virtual theatres''*

Aside from this concrete rejection of the basis of *Defence 2000*, the document talks largely in conceptual terms about a generic threat. It foresees a world where the very

[1] http://www.defence.gov.au/army/lwsc/Publications/complex_warfighting.pdf

nature of national security and war fighting has been radically changes through globalisation and technology. In doing so, it replaces the old regional capability based planning with a conceptually based planning model. Nonetheless, it comes to solid enough conclusions. In what's labelled the Chief of Army's Development Intent it lists eleven 'design rules' for the development of a 'Hardened and Networked Army', the first two being:

'It is to be optimised for close combat in complex, predominately urbanised terrain, as part of a joint inter-agency task force.'

'It is capable of being adapted to other tasks, up to and including medium-intensity warfighting in a coalition setting, and down to peace support operations and peacetime national tasks.'

So what does this tell us? Aside from the glib comment that this could be construed as, once again, getting ready to fight the last war, there are a couple of observations to make. Firstly, it would allow a substantial political, but militarily inconsequential, commitment to coalition operations as was in the case in Korea, Vietnam, and may have been sought for Iraq. Secondly, it provides the capability to undertake a demanding combined arms deployment in the region (or beyond) that the current essentially light infantry force cannot handle.

If the Government wants to exercise the first option and return to cold-war forward defence scale contributions to coalition operations they should say so. It will be a hard one to explain given the remarkable kudos we've got from much more modest, and somewhat less risky, deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq.

If, instead, they view this as a 'silver bullet' to cure some range of credible contingencies in the region or perhaps beyond, then we need to know what they might be, and especially how they relate to having the amphibious capability to forcibly lodge a battalion onto foreign soil. In particular, we need to understand if this is a force developed with the immediate region in mind (as official strategic guidance would imply) or if the higher level of capability is a response to possible tasks in the broader Asia-Pacific.

With the exception of our smaller pacific island neighbours (who lack sophisticated weapons systems demanding a combined arms response), we have a boutique army that is tiny by regional military standards and insignificant by the scale of regional populations and geography. So what is it that we will be able to achieve in the region through the surgical application of a combined arms ground force and its amphibious capability? Will it, for example, provide a quantum leap in the circumstances where we can evacuate Australian nationals from crisis zones?

Here's the problem; while there is no question that networking and hardening the Army will deliver some additional military options to the Government in the region, it will be a happy coincidence if these options fill a significant strategic gap given that the *scale* of any Australian land force operation is set by the legacy size of the Army, which was itself a compromise between the hard reality of an all-volunteer force and the short-warning continental defence of Australia scenario.

So far, the level of new investment amounts at most to a couple of billions of dollars, significant but hardly enough to imperil the air and naval capabilities required for control of our air and maritime approaches. But without a firm understanding of where the Army is headed, we may not have seen the end of what will be needed.

To start with, there is a yarning gap in capable ground based air defence in the current make-up of the combined arms capability. And Defence is already examining whether the Short-Take-Off-and-Landing (STOVL) variant of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) can refuel and rearm from the deck of the amphibious vessels. Eventually the realities of vessel maintenance and availability will drive the argument for three amphibious vessels to provide an assurance that two will be ready for action at any one time. And it remains to be seen if the demand for protecting the force will escalate into a requirement for the Air Warfare Destroyer to be fitted with a theatre ballistic missile defence capability. None of this will be cheap.

One thing is certain, the systemic undermanning of Army units will have to be addressed to provide the six full strength infantry battalions necessary to sustain the brigade (light armoured or otherwise). At present we have five a bit battalions. As it stands, we are developing a combined arms capability that is short of the most important ingredient – soldiers.

Beyond that, there's the possibility of adding a third battalion-strength manoeuvrer unit to the brigade to provide a tactical reserve force. If the goal is combined arms close combat this will be necessary. This was exactly what happened in Vietnam where the initial under strength Australian task force had to be reinforced with a third battalion. Before then, the force was below the critical mass needed to avoid devoting a sizable part of itself to 'force protection' rather than mission delivery. Sustaining a three manoeuvrer unit brigade on deployment is simply impossible with the current Army of around 26,000 for more than a short period. To do so in 1969 required a permanent Army of 44,000 including over 15,000 conscripts.

Just as worrying is the increasing range of complex tasks being heaped onto this small force. In the 1960s, the Army focused on jungle warfare, and then with defence of Australia the focus shifted to fighting in the north of the continent. But if current plans proceed, the Army will have to master not just complex urban warfare but also joint amphibious operations and medium-intensity coalition operations. It will make for a very crowded training year for our soldiers.

Defending Australia 2005, 2006, 2007…

It's hard to guess what the next White Paper might say. In many ways it looks like the Government is sticking to the principles set out in Defence 2000, yet there are signs – especially from Army – that a quite different agenda is being run. But this is critical because when it all boils down, the strategic debate since 1987 has largely been about the role of land forces.

To be frank, it is unclear whether the development of our land forces is being driven by strategic guidance, or whether, in the absence of clear guidance, the Army is building the capability to operate in the broadest range of circumstances not knowing where they might be sent next. If this is the case, you can hardly blame them for

making prudent preparations in the absence of any assurances to the contrary. However, the link between strategic guidance and force development is becoming very frayed in the process. Indeed, *Complex Warfighting* is at best separate from, if not in conflict with, the Government's stated policy.

Perhaps we should not make too much of the Future Land Operational Concept *Complex Warfighting*, after all, it is only a draft document. But this begs the question; if the rationale for, and conception of, a 'Hardened and Networked Army' set out in *Complex Warfighting* is not driving the current push, what is? And moreover, what is the argument being put to Government for a 'Hardened and Networked Army'? Is it set out in terms of defending Australia and immediate region as implied by the force structure determinants in *Defence 2000*, or has the Government quietly embraced the more radical geography-free vista set out in *Complex Warfighting*?

Enough is enough. The time is long overdue for the Government to clearly state its position and give some clear strategic-level guidance on how it wants to use land forces. In the absence of this, it will purely be a matter of chance whether the resulting 'emergent strategy' is feasible, affordable or desirable.

> *'You ask, what is our policy? I say it is to wage war by land, sea and air. War with all our might and with all the strength God has given us, and to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy.'*
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> Winston Churchill's first address to Parliament as Prime Minister
> 13 May 1940